



Linkages to Learning, a Collaborative School-based Partnership among the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services, Montgomery County Public Schools, Public and Private Agencies, Families and Communities

Through the Kitchen Door Creates New Opportunities

On the morning of November 1, a group of mothers from Linkages to Learning at Summit Hall E.S. joined Montgomery County officials and business leaders at St. Martins Catholic Community in Gaithersburg to celebrate their graduation from *Through the Kitchen Door*. During the one-week training program, participants learned about food preparation and nutrition, professionalism, and making healthy personal choices.

This new initiative with *Through the Kitchen Door* was piloted as an expansion of the Linkages' Women's Empowerment Program and funded through donations from Travilah ES's PTA. "In addition to having the support of skillful teachers and caring communities, we feel children learn best when their parents are confident and have opportunities to become economically, socially and emotionally secure," said Vivian Yao, program manager with Linkages.

According to *Kitchen Door's* founder, Liesel Flashenberg, the kitchen door opens many possibilities, allowing trainees to take charge of their lives at home, while considering ways of expanding professional opportunities. "The kitchen as classroom can have a profound impact on participants' confidence and independence, the health of their families and the economic development of the community," notes Flashenberg.



CRAIG LOGUE, SUMMIT HALL PRINCIPAL, CLEANS UP

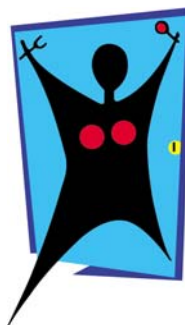


KITCHEN DOOR STUDENTS LEARNING AT ST. MARTINS CATHOLIC COMMUNITY'S KITCHEN

Participant Maria Mendoza, who immigrated to Gaithersburg from South America, agrees. "I learned a lot of good tips of how to provide good nutrition to my children... like how to get them to eat vegetables and fish. I thought it was good to learn some more cooking and to take care of our bodies by eating healthy."

Ana Schmitz, Linkages' site coordinator at Summit Hall, explains the program's goals. "We are hoping to introduce healthy, economical cooking techniques while helping each mother to grow and build relationships within the community. And since each day's cooking project supports St. Martins Catholic Community's soup kitchen, we're building upon our parents' interest in reaching out to help others. Finding out they have something to give really changes their lives in many important ways," observes Schmitz.

Guests at the *Kitchen Door's* first graduating "brunch" included representatives from many organizations committed to developing a skilled workforce and supporting women's issues. The women's desire for growth and the delicious cuisine were all that was needed to convince Marty Monks, director of the new Judy Center in Gaithersburg, to offer the group its first professional opportunity: catering the Center's grand opening. Groups and businesses interested in supporting Linkages Women's Empowerment programs may contact Vivian Yao, private partner representative with Linkages' Resource Team, at 240.777.1109.



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Building Quality through Peer Review Teams

Linkages has continually focused on improving its services for children and families throughout a decade of expansion. This year, we continued the process, bringing Linkages staff members together from several sites to "hammer out" a quality assurance plan.

This task is complex, as nearly one hundred staff members and interns serve 23 schools, plus Linkages engages many more community volunteers. In addition, Linkages professionals respond to Linkages Resource Team, their respective partner agencies, schools and communities as they deliver services to almost 3,000 children and parents each year. The varied professional and diverse cultural background of Linkages staff presents challenges as well as opportunities to strengthen the skills of our team members throughout the quality assurance process.

The plan articulates universal expectations and standards for all Linkages to Learning sites to ensure families receive quality services.

The quality assurance process evaluates important aspects of service provision relating to client records, supervision, communication, referral procedures, volunteer management and client satisfaction.

To evaluate how each site team is doing, the plan calls for an on-site peer review by a designated Linkages Quality Assurance Committee at least once every two years. The review process began in July with a committee visit to Highland ES, and has continued with reviews at Summit Hall, Broad Acres, Harmony Hills and Gaithersburg MS. The two hour evaluations involve a team of evaluators from other Linkages sites, with staffing to reflect the review site. During the visit, staff are questioned as a group about their site and the evaluators catalogue their answers. Next, site staff are interviewed by their counterparts on the evaluation team about issues unique to their positions, discussing successes and challenges they face while doing their jobs.

Lastly, the whole group reconvenes and the supervisor reports on the overall impressions of the reviewers. This process provides an opportunity for site staff to ask questions and gain specific suggestions from peers holding similar positions.

Staff participating in the evaluations consistently report that the review has been helpful, providing opportunities to share ideas and discover what's going on at other sites. Administrators learn what is working well and discover common concerns and challenges to the program.

Haifa Peter, a clinical supervisor for Linkages, said "We are so impressed with the responsiveness of staff. They're sharing ideas and experiences so that everyone involved may improve the quality of services for children and families. Although time consuming, the peer-review experience is proving to be very beneficial for all the team members involved."

Linkages to the Library Keeps Kids Reading

Nearly 500 children participated in the fourth annual Linkages to the Library program at six libraries. This innovative summer program promotes family literacy,

strengthens children's reading skills, teaches parents how to use computers and the Internet and helps families learn more about their local libraries.



Children charmed by "Mouse" at First Book's fundraiser with Barnes & Noble in Bethesda. First Book Montgomery County donated 250 children's books to Linkages from Harper Collins, publisher of Laura Numeroff's "If You Give a Mouse a Cookie."

Thanks to the collaborative efforts of numerous agencies, businesses and community organizations children and their families from Broad Acres, Summit Hall, Greencastle, Harmony Hills, Kemp Mill, Highland and Viers Mill Elementary schools were able to ride the bus one night per week to their local library to participate in the program. Reading buddies from Parkland and Banneker Middle schools as well as many area high schools worked with younger children to select books and read together. Approximately 1,500 new books were distributed to children to encourage attendance and a love of reading.



Reading Buddy volunteer assists Linkages to the Library participant

The books were collected by Comcast from their customers and library patrons and through donations by First Book and USA Today.

This worthwhile program could not take place without the generous sponsorship of Comcast, Friends of the Library, First Book's Montgomery County, USA Today and the tireless efforts and support of the Montgomery County Public Library staff and administrators and the Linkages to Learning staff and summer coordinators, and our volunteers.



Thanks to our Donors and Partners



Gwen Strike, for donating funds to meet the emergency needs of families;

Cherterel Goss and employees and customers of Starbucks, Embassy Suites and the shops of Chevy Chase Pavilion, for donating winter clothing and blankets to Linkages families;

Sangreeta Shah, for donating a computer to Linkages family;

Regina Ryals and Host Marriott Service Corp., for donating new t-shirts, sweatshirts, and other gift items to Linkages families;

Camp Pecometh and Linkages donors for providing overnight camp scholarships for six children from Oak View ES and to **Thanh Nguyen**, family services aide, for transporting children and parents;

Chris Renshaw and the Bethesda Chamber of Commerce for donating school supplies to 20 children at Parkland MS;

Linkages staff members for donating school supplies to meet the needs of ten children;

The Housing Opportunities Commission for providing therapeutic camp scholarships for six Linkages children at Broad Acres ES;

The Colburn Family Foundation and D.C. United for donating 330 soccer tickets to Linkages families;

Mental Health Association's DADS Program, for providing diapers to Linkages families;

Anthony Marinucci and the Wheaton Kiwanis Club, for donating funds to meet a family's emergency shelter needs from Highland ES;

Lutheran Church of St. Andrews' Vacation Bible School, for donating school supplies and funding to meet the needs of 45 children in Kennedy Cluster Schools;

Linda Mayo, Cindy Cunningham and Travilah ES PTA, for donating \$2,200 to Summit Hall's families to fund *Through the Kitchen Door* and for donating school supplies for 20 students at Summit Hall ES;

Karen Matthiesen and the Aid Association for Lutherans in Olney, for donating funds to meet the emergency needs of Linkages to Learning families;

Linda Cook and United Methodist Women, for donating school supplies for 25 children at Summit Hall ES;

Reverend Clark and Sandy Boynton at the Episcopal Church of the Ascension, for donating school supplies to 82 students at Summit Hall ES, Gaithersburg MS, and Highland ES;

Wheaton Kiwanis Club, for donating "July 4th" baskets to Highland Families;

Wheaton Presbyterian Church, for donating school supplies to 10 children and for providing coats to 24 children at Highland ES;

Marcella Barreto, Louise Friend, Margarita Matamorros, Liliana Pena and Edward Solis, volunteer tutors at Highland's expanded ESOL program;

Amy Ross and PTA members from Westland MS, for donating school supplies to 25 students at Parkland MS;

Millian United Methodist Church, for its new partnership with Parkland MS;

Dominos Pizza for donating pizza for Family Fun Night at Parkland MS;

Hillel Abrams, Esq., for donating six computers, two printers, a fax machine and office furniture to Linkages families;

Kathy Hargett, for honoring Cathy Young, Summit Hall ES teacher by donating funds to purchase books and materials for Summit Hall's Adult ESL Program;

Jean Noble, for donating funds for school supplies for five students at Parkland Middle School;

Karen Greenberg and Temple Beth Ami Nursery School, for donating diapers, children's clothing, books, videos and household items to Linkages families

Geneva Nursery School, for donating early childhood equipment to Linkages programs and family childcare providers;

Jawad Ettayebi and Einstein Bagels of Chevy Chase, Maryland, for donating several hundred bagels to teachers and school staff at Oak View ES, Montgomery Knolls ES and Eastern MS during a code blue day;

Chris Collins Weinstein, Deidre Donohoe and USA Today, Inc., for donating hundreds of new children's books to Linkages children;

Lynne Ganek of the Montgomery County Local Advisory Board of First Book, for donating 1,500 books to support Linkages to the Library and to Harper Collins Publishers and Laura Numeroff for donating an additional 250 new children's books;

Geoff Edgar, assistant principal and families from Eastern Middle School for donating over 93 winter jackets and accessories to EMS students;

Julia Alkire and Emilie Crown, Montgomery County Child Passenger Safety Program and Safe Kids Coalition, for arranging to provide car and booster seats and training for Linkages families;

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Christabelle Salmon and Cherterel Goss from Chevy Chase Pavilion with donated winter coats

A View from Linkages Sites...

After the summer ends, it's time to get busy introducing ourselves to the schools we serve. Most Linkages teams participate in Open Houses, Back to School Nights and other informal opportunities for parents, teachers and students to "drop by" and learn about Linkages services. As teachers, staff and families identify the needs of individual students, counseling and therapeutic recreation groups begin, while a new cycle of prevention and educational programs are made available for parents and students.

Down-County

Broad Acres ES and White Oak MS

- Camp Gateway offered recreation and therapeutic summer camp for elementary and middle school students.
- The Home Learning Centers' family technology education initiative continues to thrive, with partners and volunteers donating training and computers.
- Volunteers from Broad Acres ES PTA and MSI offered intramural soccer to more than 100 children (photos p.8).

Greencastle ES and Banneker MS

- Over two hundred participants joined 30 presenters in educational and fun prevention activities at the first East County Family Health Fair, sponsored by Linkages to Learning/AMIGO, Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services, Community Kids, Eastern Montgomery Regional Services Center, Holy Cross Hospital, and East County Community Center. Hope Worldwide provided volunteers for the event.
- Bradley Hills Presbyterian Church funded the "Teen Talk" after school group for Banneker students and the "Career Path" series for parents interested in strengthening employment skills.

Oak View ES/New Hampshire Estates ES and Pine Crest ES/Montgomery Knolls ES

- Demie Stathoplos of the Child Center's Amigo program led a six-week "United to End Racism" workshop series at all four schools
- Carla Pappas, mental health counselor and the school's guidance counselors are co-facilitating "Common Sense Parenting."
- A Child Safety workshop highlighting bullying prevention strategies was sponsored by MHA's Voices VS. Violence. VVV delivers these programs with dinner and child care at multiple schools in partnership with Linkages to Learning.
- Recent classes include basic and intermediate computer classes and an internet class, as well as health education, English, pre-GED and yoga classes.

Rolling Terrace ES

- Sofia Travella, mental health therapist, has been providing home visits and lunchtime socialization groups for children and support groups for parents. Alba Palacios, case manager, is collaborating with community agencies to increase family support resources.

Eastern Middle School

- Support programs for students include an acculturation group and a suspension intervention group.
- A new women's support group, the "Moms' Group" has begun meeting and is making jewelry to connect its members.

Silver Spring International MS

- Heather Joffe is running a weekly acculturation group in Spanish for Latina girl's who are recent immigrants.
- David Cueva is co-facilitating a therapeutic recreation group.

Mid-County

Harmony Hills ES and Viers Mill ES

- Linkages after-school tutoring program, now in its third year at Harmony Hills, has expanded to two days a week. Sixteen HHES children receive one-to-one tutoring from community and Wheaton High School volunteers. A new program is in the works to serve students at VMES.
- Linkages and the PTA collaborated with Voices VS. Violence's to present "Keeping Kids Safe," for 100+ community members from VMES and HHES.

Highland ES

- Linkages expanded its ESOL program with Wheaton Presbyterian Church, bringing Linkages' parents and adults from WPC's *Cristo Rey (Christ the King)* together for multi-level classes. Child-care is available in WPC's nursery.

Maryvale ES

- Welcome to our newest partners, who have rolled up their sleeves to deliver school-based services!

Kennedy Cluster

- Therapeutic recreation groups are offered in partnership with therapists Linn Rivera at Argyle MS. Linn and Dirk Schenck are also providing "TRP" this fall at Sally Ride, Summit Hall, Highland, Pine Crest and Viers Mill elementary schools and at Silver Spring International and Parkland middle schools.

Parkland MS

- Sara Bellisario, mental health counselor, is leading an anger management group for boys, a healthy relationship group for girls, and a grief and loss group.
- Working with Harmony Hills, Parkland is offering four levels of English classes.
- Family Fun Night was well-attended in July, with partners from White Flint Wellness providing a stress-reduction presentation for parents.

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Up-County

Fox Chapel ES

- Summer programs included therapeutic recreation for 5th grade boys, led by Dirk Schenck and Shannon Mulloy, and a middle school transition group led by Shannon.
- Linkages staff started the new school year with a pre-service diversity training for all staff at FCES, coordinated by case manager, Ibrayina Aldana. Training was presented by Laura White and Denise Woods from Montgomery College Workforce Development and Continuing Education. Two parents, Maria Ortega and Sonia Rodriguez, provided food and participated in an information panel.
- FCES Linkages promoted its services during Open House and Back-to-School night, and launched a bilingual parent newsletter this fall.
- Community volunteer, Carlos Devis, led "Problems, Opportunities to Grow" for fathers. Nilda Colgrove from MCPS Parent information and Training Center facilitated the weekly Hispanic Women's Educational Support Group.
- Shannon Mulloy led Healthy Relationships and Empowerment groups for kindergarten and first graders.
- In late October, Linkages initiated its bilingual Parenting Enhancement Series.



Donors and Partners (continued from page 3)

Comcast and customers, Montgomery County Public Library staff and patrons, for donating hundreds of children's books;

Students from The Other Way (TOW) School, Parkland MS, Westland MS, and Wheaton HS for sorting thousands of donated children's books;

Laura Perez (ESOL teacher) and Maura Venderzon, for serving as volunteers in Parkland MS's adult English classes;

Toys R Us, Rockville for donating Halloween costumes to Broad Acres ES children;

Washington Hebrew Congregation, for donating 100 backpacks and school supplies to Broad Acres children;

Ina Joung, for donating a sofa to a family from Rolling Terrace ES;

Jennifer Oppenheim, for donating a piano to a family from Rolling Terrace ES;

Rob Chacter, for donating a sofa to a family from Rolling Terrace ES;

Duina Reyes, for donating clothing to a family from Rolling Terrace ES;

Than Geraci and Housing Opportunities Commission, for donating and transporting furniture for a Rolling Terrace family;

Syma Gringberg and Whole Foods Market of Silver Spring, for donating food to meet a Rolling Terrace family's emergency needs;

Chet Cowen of Rockville, for donating a computer to a family from Rolling Terrace ES;

Gaithersburg ES

- The team has settled into its new space and welcomes Luis Navas-Migueloa as its new mental health counselor.
- Case management services are provided through a partnership with the City of Gaithersburg's Parent Resource Center.

Gaithersburg MS

- Seventeen parents attended bilingual (English/Spanish) workshops for parents in the fall.

Sally Ride ES

- The Linkages team initiated a series of bilingual (English/Spanish) workshops for parents in mid-October. Despite fears about the sniper, 28 enthusiastic parents attended.

Summit Hall ES

- Community volunteers supported Linkages after-school program serving 21 students enrolled in the summer extended learning opportunities program.
- A Parents' Homework Club, provides guidance for parents interested in learning how to helping their children with homework. The program is coordinated by Maribel De la Cruz of MCPS ESOL with assistance of Miriam Israel, community volunteer.
- The Hispanic Women's Educational Group meets weekly for breakfast. Recently, the group created a Hispanic Heritage bulletin board for the school.
- A new, four-session Computer class is being offered through a partnership with the Media Center, the PTA and Linkages.

Dr. Alan Gold of Rockville, for providing free eye exams to two students from Gaithersburg MS, and to **Lenscrafters at Lakeforest Mall in Gaithersburg** for providing free eye glasses to these two students;

Two Linkages staff members at Broad Acres, for donating funds to meet a family's emergency housing needs;

Holy Cross Hospital, for donating 30 computers to Linkages families from Broad Acres ES/White Oak MS;

American College of Cardiology, for donating children's clothing for Fox Chapel ES

Liberty Grove Free Methodist Church, Parker Memorial Baptist Church and Allen Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church, for donating 50+ backpacks and school supplies for Greencastle and Banneker students;

Bradley Hills Presbyterian Church, for sponsoring Teen Talk and Career Path for Greencastle and Banneker students and families;

Renee Gabriel and Veronica Bosley, for assisting at the East County Health Fair.

Jessica Olivarres for assisting with Greencastle's *Career Path*;

Joanne Peter and NIH employees for 20 winter coats for Highland students;

Montgomery Soccer Inc., for working with the Broad Acres PTA leadership, the community and Linkages to enroll and sponsor over 100 children in a piloted "intramural" soccer league (photos, p. 8), for donating scholarships for registration, uniforms and equipment and for sharing volunteers.

Linkages to Learning and Professional Development

The Linkages partners recruit skilled site coordinators, mental health counselors, case managers and community service aides with many special qualities. They are energetic, caring, empathetic, diligent, creative, professional and resourceful, enabling them to respond to our families' many needs. Because Linkages staff work in settings apart from their host agency's supervisors and administrative staff, it is essential that they receive ongoing support and specialized training.

Staff development is provided through local, state and national public and private organizations, and by academic institutions. The following sessions are among the many training opportunities utilized by Linkages staff this year:

- **Parent to Parent: Parenting for Safe and Drug-Free Youth:** Prevention specialist Frankie Engelking shared this evidence-based parent education program with site coordinators at the Montgomery County Community Partnership's Prevention Center and conducted facilitator's training.
- **Abused Person's Program:** Kathy Lunsford provided an overview of the program for Linkages mental health counselors;
- **Role of the Pupil Personnel Worker:** Karen Craney of Montgomery County Public Schools discussed the part PPWs play on student services teams;
- **Child Protective Services:** DHHS' Child Welfare Services worker Denyse Fredricksson conducted a two-part series focusing on identification and reporting child abuse and learning how to work effectively with the Child Protective Services team;



Linkages case manager Kathy Wilcox Moore reviews materials at the Prevention Center

- **Boundaries: How to Help Others Help Themselves:** Cindy Samples with Healthy Families Montgomery provided this training for Linkages' family service aides and case managers;
- **Substance Abuse Assessment Intervention and Resources,** offered by Catherine McAlpine, DHHS Adult Addiction Services;
- **Children Witnessing Domestic Violence,** presented by Marja Booker, DHHS Abused Persons Program;
- **Conflict Resolution Skills Training** at Linkages annual retreat, featured John Spiegel and Martin Kranitz, (seen on the left).
- **Grief at Schools,** presented by Helen Fitzgerald from the American Hospice Foundation;

Other training has been provided by Linkages staff with specific expertise to share, including:

- **Nicki Sanders,** site coordinator at Greencastle Elementary School, shared the Employment Guide

she developed to assist parents in their journey to achieve economic self-sufficiency.

- **Carla Pappas** and **Nancy Jimenez,** mental health counselor and site coordinator at Pine Crest and Montgomery Knolls Elementary Schools, respectively, created a resource manual to assist parents in finding affordable housing in Montgomery County.
- **Linn Rivera** and **Dirk Schenck,** Linkages therapeutic recreation specialists, shared their best practices with our mental health clinicians and led "Basics of Group Work" for Linkages staff
- **Bob Evert,** program director at Broad Acres ES, conducted "Cultural Awareness and Understanding" training for 80 members of Linkages staff and AmeriCorps volunteers.
- **Evelyn Wilson,** automated systems manager, has offered training to Linkages staff, including multi-level courses for Microsoft products and "HATS" (HIDTA Automated Tracking System), Linkages integrated, data management system.
- **Yvonne Dodd,** former site coordinator at Highland Elementary School and **Haifa Peter,** DHHS clinical supervisor, have oriented and trained all new staff on Linkages guidelines and community resources.





Bob Evert engages Linkages staff and AmeriCorps volunteers at Sherwood HS's Media Center

Welcome New Staff and Interns

Carol Binta, Site Coordinator, Maryvale ES
Robin Sparer, Supervisor, Rockville Youth, Family and Community Services
Yu-Ling Huang, Americorp Volunteer Coordinator
David Cueva, Mental Health Counselor at Silver Spring International and Eastern MS
Amy Colagiovanni, Mental Health Counselor at Eastern MS
Maria Cueta, Case Manager at Montgomery Knolls/Pinecrest ES
Lilliam Maysonet, Case Manager at New Hampshire Estates/Oak View ES
America Taveras, Case Manager, Harmony Hills ES
Andrea Berry, Case Manager, Viers Mill ES
Luis Navas-Migueloa, Mental Health Counselor at Gaithersburg ES
Heather Joffe, Site Coordinator/Case Manager at Silver Spring International MS
Tran-Chau Le, Case Manager at Broad Acres ES
Cristie Harhai, School Nurse, Gaithersburg ES and Gaithersburg MS
Aurora Gavilan, School Nurse, Summit Hall ES
Joanne Banda, School Nurse, Maryvale ES
Julie Olson, School Nurse, Fox Chapel ES
Gail Michaels, School Nurse, Sally Ride ES
Yarisa Recinos, 2nd year student, University of Maryland at Baltimore, School of Social Work, Broad Acres ES
Sarah Hardy, George Washington University, PsyD. student, Broad Acres ES
Dana Ratsprecher, George Washington University, PsyD. student, Broad Acres ES

Maria Nichols, University of Maryland at Baltimore, School of Social Work, Highland ES
Patricia Rivas, University of Maryland at Baltimore, School of Social Work, Highland ES
Allen Gang, University of Maryland at Baltimore, School of Social Work, Parkland MS
Samantha Lieberman from Johns Hopkins University, Counseling Program, Summit Hall ES
Nandred Navarro, University of Maryland at Baltimore, School of Social Work, Summit Hall ES
Andrea Beltran, Montgomery College, Mental Health Program, Summit Hall ES



Building our Linkages teams at the Annual Retreat

Congratulations!

Olivia Aybar-Torres, community services aide at Highland Elementary School, for her scholarship from the University of Maryland's School of Social Work to attend University of Utah's substance abuse and mental health conference.

Marta Contreras, site coordinator at Broad Acres, for her appearance on *La Computación y Nosotros* TV, Channel 16.

Bob Evert, program director at Broad Acres, and former Linkages/University of Maryland project director **Jennifer Oppenheim**, for the publication of "Elementary School-Based Mental Health Programs: Advantages and Opportunities," in *School and Community Based Approaches to Providing Mental Health Services to Youth Where They Are*.

Joan Glick, nurse manager for the school based health centers and Irm Pichot, nurse administrator and public health representative for Linkages Resource Team, elected respectively as secretary and treasurer of the Maryland Assembly of School-Based Health Care.

Joan presented "Serving Culturally Diverse Families" at the National Assembly on School-Based Health Care conference. **Sharon Strauss**, program specialist, presented "Fool Proof Public Relations," at the conference and joined with **Vivian Yao** at the Center for School Mental Health Assistance's conference to present "Communication to Increase Engagement."





Douglas M. Duncan, County Executive
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The Broad Acres ES PTA and MSI "Kicks-Off" its first intramural season, registering over 100 children for fall soccer.

